

State Animal Control Set To Launch January 1 With New Website and Hotline

DOVER – The Division of Public Health's Office of Animal Welfare's Delaware Animal Services enforcement unit will provide dog control services to New Castle, Kent, and Sussex counties beginning January 1, 2016. Delaware Animal Services (DAS) has been providing animal cruelty and rabies control since September, and with the expansion of services to include animal control, all animal law enforcement services will be consolidated into one statewide unit. The City of Wilmington will continue to provide animal control services through a contracted provider until June 30, 2016.

After January 1, a team of 20 Animal Welfare Officers will respond to complaints of animal cruelty, incidents of human rabies exposure, and stray animals, including stray dogs, livestock, and seriously injured, ill, or endangered stray cats.

DAS officers will represent the most highly trained animal control officers in Delaware's history. In addition to more than 90 years of combined law enforcement experience, Animal Welfare Officers completed state Animal Control and Cruelty Certification Training, the Delaware Constable Academy through Delaware Technical Community College, and field training with animal handling. In December, officers were also trained by a national leader in the field on Community Policing Techniques for Animal Control. The training focused on community-centric approaches to animal control to reduce pet relinquishment and prevent animal neglect through compassionate resources and education to animal owners in need of such services.

"Our officers serve as pet ambassadors in the community to

solve underlying issues that cause animals to become homeless or abused. Our ultimate goal is preventing cruelty to animals and animal homelessness, and training is critical to accomplishing that goal," said Chief Mark Tobin, DAS Supervisor.

"The public should expect that those enforcing animal welfare laws are highly trained and field-tested," said Hetti Brown, Director of the Office of Animal Welfare (OAW). "With the consolidation of animal control services at the state level, we had an opportunity to ensure all officers received consistent law enforcement and animal services training."

For the sheltering due to the new enforcement duties, the Delaware Office of Animal Welfare selected Chester County SPCA, which will operate shelters and kennels in Delaware, to provide humane sheltering and adoption services for homeless animals and rehabilitative services for abused animals. The selection was the result of a Request-for-Proposal issued by the OAW last August.

Delaware Animal Services will also focus on preventing pet relinquishment and cruelty through public education and the launch of a compassionate resources program. This program, set to launch in early 2016, will offer resources such as pet food and litter, dog houses, and other animal care items to pet owners in need.

Formation of the new unit began after the Delaware General Assembly passed enabling legislation last June to centralize animal control responsibilities within the state, an action that was first requested in 2013 by the Delaware Animal Welfare Task Force in published recommendations. After the recommendations were published, the OAW worked closely with county, city, and state representatives, local animal shelters and animal welfare organizations, and members of the public to draft two sets of recommendations calling for the establishment of a state-run animal control function.

Residents wishing to report potential animal cruelty or an exposure to rabies through an animal bite or scratch can do so through the Delaware Animal Services Hotline at 302-255-4646. After January 1, the hotline will also accept calls concerning stray or injured animals, or concerns about housing and care of animals. Non-emergency reports may also be submitted by email at DelawareAnimalServices@delaware.gov.

DAS will receive calls 24 hours a day, 7 days a week from Delaware residents wishing to report stray or injured animals, animal cruelty, or rabies exposures. The in-house dispatch service operates between 8:00 a.m. – 8:00 p.m. Monday-Friday, and 10:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m. on weekends and holidays. After-hours calls are received by our call service, which will dispatch emergency calls to on-call officers.

With the Jan. 1 launch of Delaware Animal Services, a new state website, AnimalServices.delaware.gov, will provide a Lost and Found Pet Registry. Photos and descriptions of all found stray animals will be posted in the searchable registry to help pet owners looking for their companions. A second phase, which will launch later this winter, will include updates to the Lost and Found Registry that will allow residents and organizations to post lost or found animals. The revised website will also offer new options for purchasing dog licenses, reporting non-emergency animal cruelty, and educational resources for the community.

Delaware Health and Social Services is committed to improving the quality of the lives of Delaware's citizens by promoting health and well-being, fostering self-sufficiency, and protecting vulnerable populations. DPH, a division of DHSS, urges Delawareans to make healthier choices with the 5-2-1 Almost None campaign: eat 5 or more fruits and vegetables each day, have no more than 2 hours of recreational screen time each day (includes TV, computer, gaming), get 1 or more hours of physical activity each day, and drink almost no sugary beverages.